# STEM EXTENSION
## OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (STEM OPT)

F-1 students who are currently approved for Post-Completion OPT and have completed a bachelors, masters, or doctoral degree in a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) field are eligible to apply for a 24-month extension of their practical training.


Students are permitted a total of two periods of the 24-month STEM extension, each immediately following a 12-month OPT period. Students applying for a second STEM extension must have earned a second qualifying degree at a higher education level.

**Please note that this is not an entitled benefit.** USCIS has the right to deny any STEM OPT application at their discretion.

## Who is eligible to apply?

- You must be approved for post-completion OPT and submit your application no earlier than 90 days before the OPT end date and no later than the OPT end date.
- You must be engaging in employment directly related to your STEM degree
- You must have earned a bachelor’s degree or higher in a STEM-approved field:
  - If you wish to apply for STEM OPT based on a previous degree, you must have received the degree from a SEVP-certified institution within the past 10 years and the institution must be accredited at the time you apply for the STEM extension
  - Overseas campuses of U.S. educational institutions are not eligible for SEVP-certification and degrees from these schools cannot be used to apply for STEM OPT
- Your current or prospective STEM OPT employer must be registered in the E-verify program
- Your current or prospective STEM OPT employer must employ you in a paid position and that position must be at least 21 hours per week and related to your program of study

**NOTE:** If you have participated in 12 months or more of full-time CPT, if you have already done STEM OPT twice, or if your Post-OPT has ended, you **DO NOT** qualify for the STEM extension.
How to Apply For STEM OPT

Applying for STEM OPT is a 2-step process. Please note you must complete both steps otherwise you have not completed the STEM OPT application process.

**STEP 1: Apply for STEM OPT I-20**

1) Complete the Form I-983 Training plan (sections 1-6).


**PLEASE FOLLOW THESE INSTRUCTIONS CAREFULLY.**

You should complete Sections 1 and 2. Your employer will complete Sections 3, 4, and 6. Work together with your employer to complete Section 5.

**I-983 Section 1 Instructions**

**Student Name:** Provide your name.

**Student Email Address:** provide your preferred email address

**Name of School Recommending STEM OPT:** University of Utah

**Name of School Where STEM Degree Was Earned:**

- If this STEM OPT extension application is based on your most recent degree earned at University of Utah, put University of Utah
- If this STEM OPT extension application is based on a prior degree, enter the name of the US school where you completed a prior STEM degree.

**SEVIS School Code of School Recommending STEM OPT:** This can be found on your I-20. University of Utah’s code is DEN214F10094000.

**Designated School Official Name and Contact Information:** You can find DSO’s information from your most recent I-20 under School Attestation. You can put “200 S. Central Campus Dr. RM 410, SLC, UT 84112, 801-581-8876, international@utah.edu” as the contact information.
Student SEVIS ID No.: This is found in the top right corner of your I-20 and begins with N.

STEM OPT Requested Period: “From” date is the day after your last day of post-completion OPT (refer to your EAD card). “To” date should be two (2) years after the “from” date.

Qualifying Major and Classification of Instructional Program (CIP) Code: Write both your major and the CIP code. This is found on your I-20 under Program of Study, next to your major. It is in the format of xx.xxxx

Level/Type of Qualifying Degree: Provide your degree level. Ex: Bachelor’s, Master’s, or PhD.

Date Awarded: This can be found on your transcript as “confer date”.

Based on Prior Degree:

- “No” if you are applying for STEM OPT based on your most recent degree awarded from University of Utah
- “YES” if you are applying for STEM OPT based on a prior degree and your most recent degree is not a STEM degree.

Employment Authorization Number: This is the USCIS # found on your post-completion OPT EAD card.

2. Log into iStart through the [START LOGIN] button on https://isss.utah.edu/ and submit the e-form for “STEM OPT: 24 Month STEM Extension”. You will be required to upload your completed Form I-983.

3. Once the ISSS office receives your complete STEM OPT application, you will be issued a new STEM OPT I-20 within two weeks. The new I-20 will include our recommendation for a STEM OPT extension on page 2. You will need to send in a copy of this I-20 to USCIS.

STEP 2: Send your documents to USCIS

1. Mail all the required documents to USCIS (see below) within 60 days of when your STEM OPT I-20 was issued. USCIS must receive your STEM OPT application before your post-completion OPT EAD expiration date. Please see next page for the list of documents you need to send to USCIS.

2. Keep copies of everything you mail for your own records.
Documents to send to USCIS

- Form I-765 (downloadable from www.USCIS.gov) Instructions on how to complete this form are in the I-765 Instructions guide.
- A copy of:
  - Your STEM OPT I-20 issued from ISSS with your STEM OPT dates (Remember USCIS must receive it within 60 days of the issue date). Make sure you sign and date your OPT I-20.
  - Photo page (identification page) and expiration date page of your valid passport.
  - Visa page of your passport- even if expired.
  - I-94 (obtainable at https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/home#section)
  - ALL previous I-20s issued to you in your current education level. If you do not have these, contact ISSS. We may have copies of your old I-20s. Please give ISSS one week to look for your documents. However, it is your responsibility to keep previous immigration documents. If you are missing old I-20s and ISSS does not have them on record, simply include the I-20s that you do have. Missing an old I-20 does not automatically result in a denial.
  - Previous EAD card, include a copy of the front and back
  - Your transcript and diploma that states the degree field
- Two recent passport photographs. Print your name and I-94 card number on the back of each photo. Put the photos in an envelope and attach it to front of I-765. Ensure the photos are U.S. passport size, as photos from your home country may not be the correct size. Photos must be taken within the past 30 days and must not be the same photos used for other government requests, such as passport or visa renewals.
- Fee of $410- In the form of check or money order, made to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. See page 4 for instructions on how to complete a check.
- G-1145 (recommended and downloadable from https://www.uscis.gov/g-1145) Completing this form means you will receive an email or text message when your application arrives at USCIS offices. This form needs to go on the top of your application.
- Meet with ISSS advisor to review your packet (optional but strongly encouraged).

Checklist

- Are you sending in your application within 60 days of ISSS issuing your STEM OPT I-20?
- Did you sign and date your STEM OPT I-20 and are you sending a copy and not the original?
- Did you sign and date your I-765 form?
- Will your STEM OPT request arrive at USCIS offices before your OPT end date?
- Did you include all of the documents listed above?
- Did you make copies of all STEM OPT documents for your records?
Are you ready to send in your application?

Gather all documents together and send by mail. Be sure to request a tracking number so you can track when your package was delivered. You will be mailed a paper receipt notice (Form I-797) from USCIS once they receive your STEM OPT packet. If you attached G-1145 form to the first page of your application, they will also send you an E-verification once they receive your packet.

Be sure to keep your I-797 receipt in a safe place. This receipt is proof of your pending application and allows you to remain in the United States and continue working while your application is pending.

**Mailing Information**

Find your mailing address on your I-765 form. For example, if your mailing address is in Utah, you must send it to one of the two Phoenix lockboxes depending on the carrier.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If you live in (return address on I-765):</th>
<th>Mail your application to USCIS Phoenix Lockbox:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Guam, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, South Dakota, **Utah**, Washington (state), Wisconsin, Wyoming, or Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands | If you are using US Postal Service:  
USCIS  
PO Box 21281  
Phoenix, AZ 85036  
If you are using FedEx or UPS:  
USCIS, Attn: AOS  
1820 E. Skyharbor Circle S, Suite 100  
Phoenix, AZ 85034 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If you live in (return address on I-765):</th>
<th>Mail your application to USCIS Dallas Lockbox:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Alabama, Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, U.S. Virgin Islands, or West Virginia | If you are using US Postal Service:  
USCIS  
PO Box 660867  
Dallas, TX 75266  
If you are using FedEx or UPS:  
USCIS, Attn: AOS  
2501 S. State Hwy, 121, Business  
Suite 400  
Lewisville, TX 75067 |
Sample Check/ Money Order

* If you have a money order please check with the issuer on where to put the information listed above as it can differ depending on the type of money order.

STEM OPT Timeline

- **Earliest Date to Apply for STEM**
- **Application Window 90 days**
- **180 days**
- **STEM OPT 24 Months**
- **60 days**
- **Grace period of 60 days to either leave U.S., transfer to another school, or change to another visa category**

Apply for STEM Extension up to 90 days prior to the end date of your current EAD card. USCIS must receive your STEM application before the last day of your post-completion OPT.

*Unemployment time: You cannot accrue more than 90 days on post-completion OPT. You receive an additional 60 days of unemployment time for the STEM OPT Extension. In aggregate, the total unemployment allowed on OPT and STEM OPT is 150 days.
STEM OPT Student Responsibilities

1. I-983 Training Plan:
   - To apply for STEM OPT, students must fill out the Form I-983, sections 1 and 2.
   - Students must have their employer fill out and sign sections 3, 4, and 6.
   - The student and employer work together to fill out Section 5.
   - The last page of the form is not filled out until the appropriate times during the approved STEM extension period.
   - The completed I-983 Training Plan must be submitted to ISSS at the time of STEM OPT I-20 e-form request.

2. Six Month Validations:
   - Every six months, from the start date of the student’s STEM OPT EAD card (the day following their post-completion OPT expiration), students must confirm their address and employment information by submitting a “STEM OPT: 6 Month Validation OR Annual Self-Evaluation” e-form through the iStart portal.
   - The SEVP portal will send you a reminder email to submit these validation reports about 30 days before the reporting deadline.
   - This e-form will confirm the student’s most current: legal name, physical address, employer name and address, and status of current employment. Note: This form is not used to report changes to your or your employer’s information or the I-983. Any changes must first be reported via the STEM OPT: Employment Update/Change in Training Plan e-form request. Changes to your personal address must be done via the SEVP Portal.
   - Be aware that receiving Cap Gap status for an approved H1B visa may cause confusion on your reporting times. Contact the ISSS office for guidance.
   - Students must report a change of information to ISSS within 10 days of the change via the appropriate e-form.

3. Annual Self-Evaluation:
   - Students must submit an annual self-evaluation to ISSS about the progress of their training experience. This is done on the last page of the Form I-983. Students will submit 2 evaluations: one at 12 months after the STEM OPT start date and one at the end of the STEM OPT employment period. E-forms must be submitted approximately 2 weeks prior to the reporting deadline.
The SEVP portal will send you a reminder email to submit these evaluations about 30 days before the reporting deadline.

- For the annual evaluations, students only should submit page 5 of the I-983 with the appropriate evaluation.
- Evaluation must be signed by the student and employer and submitted to ISSS through the iStart e-form “STEM OPT: 6 Month Validation OR Annual Self-Evaluation”
- Be aware that receiving Cap Gap status for an approved H1B visa may cause confusion on your reporting times. Contact the ISSS office for guidance.

4. Material Changes to an Existing Form I-983:
   - Students must report any material changes to their training plan by using the STEM OPT: Employment Update/Change in Training Plan e-form. Material changes include but are not limited to:
     - Any change in the employer’s EIN
     - Any reduction in student compensation that is not tied to a reduction in hours worked
     - Any significant decrease in hours per week worked
     - Changes to the employer’s commitments or student’s learning objective as documented on the Form I-983
   - Be aware that student’s employment authorization will not cease based on a change to the plan, as long as the regulatory requirements are being met

5. Ending Employment/Changing Employers:
   - The student must first report the loss/end of employment by submitting the e-form “STEM OPT: Employment Update/Change in Training Plan” (select reason for submission as “Loss of Employment”) and upload the final evaluation (page 5 of the I-983 only).
   - For new employment, submit the new employment information via a new “STEM OPT: Employment Update/Change in Training Plan” e-form and upload a new, completed I-983.
   - When a student changes employers, the new employer must be enrolled in E-Verify before the student begins to work
   - Note: Changes in employment must be submitted within 10 days of ending/starting the new practical training opportunity
6. **Employer Noncompliance**
   - If a student believes that their employer is not complying with the terms and regulations of the STEM OPT, the student may:
     - Contact the Student and Exchange Visitor Program at the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) at sevp@ice.dhs.gov, or (703) 603-3400 between the hours of 8:00 AM and 6:00 PM ET on weekdays, except holidays

   **Failure to comply with any and all requirements of the 24-month STEM OPT constitutes a violation of your F-1 status. It is your responsibility to provide updated and accurate information to ISSS!**

**STEM Employer Responsibilities**

1. **E-verify:** Employers must be enrolled in the E-Verify program
2. **Form I-983:** Employers must sign and assist
   - *Initial Training Plan:* employers are responsible for completing Section 3, 4, and 6 of the Form I-983, section 5 must be completed with the student
   - *Annual Self Evaluation:* employers must review the student’s self-evaluation of their own progress and sign it to attest to its accuracy
   - *Final Self Evaluation:* employers must review the student’s self-evaluation of their own progress and sign it to attest to its accuracy prior to the student’s departure from the company or 2 weeks prior to the student’s STEM extension ending
   - Please note that the official with Signatory Authority must be familiar with the STEM OPT student’s goals and performance, and have authority to affirm that the statements provided on the Form I-983 are true and correct
3. **Material Changes to an Existing Form I-983:** Employer must work with the student to report any material changes to the Form I-983
4. **Practical Training Employment Termination:** Employer and student must both notify ISSS when the student’s employment is terminated for any reason before the STEM OPT authorization ends. Employers must report such change no later than **five business days** after
the student has departed. This may be done by simply informing ISSS that the student is no longer with the company. Email: international@utah.edu

- Departure date: the date the employer knows the student has left employment, or the date after five consecutive business days have elapsed and the student has not reported for their practical training (without the employer’s consent)

**STEM OPT Related E-forms**

**STEM OPT: 24 Month STEM Extension**: This form is used to request an OPT STEM extension I-20 so you can file a STEM OPT extension request with USCIS.

**STEM OPT: Employment Update/Change in Training Plan**: This form is used to update your employment and your I-983 Training Plan, and/or to report loss of employment.

**STEM OPT: 6 Month Validation OR Annual Self-Evaluation**: This form is used to meet STEM OPT reporting obligations. You must report your STEM participation every 6 months by submitting this e-form. You must submit an annual evaluation yearly.

For detailed information on how to fill out each e-form, please log into iStart via our website at https://isss.utah.edu/ and go to “F-1 Student Services” to view the particular e-form.

**SEVP Portal Related E-forms**

**SEVP Portal Login/Password Request**: This is used to request a reset of an SEVP Portal password if you have trouble resetting your own password.

**SEVP Portal: Change E-mail Address**: This is used to change an e-mail for the purposes of the SEVIS Login portal.

**NOTE**: To update information such as address and phone number, you MUST use the SEVP portal to update this information. To update your employment or training plan, submit validations or evaluations, change your email address or reset your SEVP Portal, you must use the e-forms via iStart.

**Reminder**
• **Processing time:** your STEM OPT I-20 will be processed by ISSS within 10 business days if we have all the documents. USCIS takes an average of 3-5 months to process requests.

• **STEM OPT start date:** Your STEM OPT date will be the date after the last day on your post-completion OPT EAD card.

• **STEM OPT end date:** This is the end date on your STEM EAD card. You must end your employment on this date unless you have changed to any other visa that allows you to work.

• **60 day grace period:** You have 60 days of grace period once you complete STEM OPT. If you are remaining in the U.S. for the grace period, you cannot leave and re-enter on your F-1 visa. During your grace period, you can either leave U.S., transfer to another school, or change to another visa category.

• **60 days from the I-20 issue date:** Your STEM OPT application must be received by USCIS within 60 days of the STEM OPT I-20 issue date by ISSS. Failure to send it in a timely manner will result in denial of STEM OPT.

• **60 days of unemployment:** You receive an additional 60 days of unemployment time for the STEM extension. The aggregate unemployment allowed on OPT and STEM OPT is 150 days.

• **Part time/Full time:** You must work more than 21 hours/week on STEM OPT to count as eligible employment.

• **Address Update:** Immigration regulations require that while you are on STEM OPT, you MUST keep USCIS updated on your address. If you change your address, you must report your new address in the SEVP portal.

• **Travel:** Traveling with a pending STEM OPT is strongly **NOT** recommended. If you must travel while your STEM OPT is pending, please speak with an ISSS advisor. You may not be allowed to re-enter the U.S. until your STEM OPT is approved.

**Frequently Asked Questions for STEM OPT Extension**

**GENERAL**

1. **How long will my STEM OPT application take to process?**
   Applying for STEM OPT is a two-step process. You must first obtain your STEM OPT I-20 from International Student & Scholar Services (ISSS), which has a 10 business day processing time, and then mail your application with all the required documents to USCIS to obtain an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card, which takes average of 3-5 months to process.

2. **When should I submit my STEM OPT application?**
 extension request is 90 days prior to the end of your post-completion OPT.

3. I sent in my application but my post-completion OPT EAD card is now expired. What happens now? If the STEM application is properly and timely filed, the student’s employment authorization is considered automatically extended for up to 180 days while the STEM OPT extension request is pending. Please note USCIS must have received your STEM OPT application before your post-completion OPT has expired for you to be considered for STEM OPT.

4. Can I get a confirmation that my application has been received by USCIS? If you would like an email or text confirmation that your application has been received by USCIS, you may fill out Form G-1145 (https://www.uscis.gov/g-1145) and attach it to the top of your STEM OPT application. The notice you receive is not a guarantee that your application is approved, but merely a confirmation that it arrived at the USCIS office for processing. You will receive an official paper I-797 receipt within 2-3 weeks.

5. Does the job I have while on STEM OPT have to be paid employment, or can it be unpaid/volunteer work? It must be paid. The STEM OPT rule prohibits students from using the extension to work in a volunteer or unpaid capacity.

6. If I complete one STEM degree program, and then complete a second non-STEM degree program and apply for OPT, am I eligible to apply for the STEM extension again? Yes- only if:
   - Your second non-STEM degree was at a higher education level than the one used for the first STEM OPT extension
   - Your STEM degree was earned within the past 10 years
   - The STEM degree was earned from an appropriately accredited and SEVP-certified school inside the United States

7. Do I get a grace period after my STEM OPT? Yes, your lawful F-1 status expires 60 days after the date indicated on your STEM OPT extension EAD. This is called a "grace period". You are expected to leave the country no later than 60 days after the end date indicated on the EAD or make other arrangements to lawfully remain in the U.S. However, if you decide to quit your STEM OPT before it officially ends, you must leave the U.S. immediately, as no grace period applies in that situation unless you have other legal means of remaining in the US.

8. What if I have lost or thrown away my old I-20s? The International Student & Scholar Services office may have copies of your old I-20s in your file. You can request that ISSS make you copies of your old I-20s through istart using the e-form "Request for Document Copies", but keep in mind that it could take up to 2 weeks to process your request. Also note that it is your responsibility to keep your I-20s in your record. Your file may or may not contain copies of the documents you are looking for. It is best if you maintain a well-kept file of your documents in a safe place.
9. Since I am moving this summer (and I still have not moved to my new address), can I use a foreign address to receive the EAD?
No, USCIS requires that you indicate an address in the United States and the address must be appropriate to the Service Center address to which you send your application due to jurisdiction issues. You may not put a foreign address on form I-765. The address you use may be a P. O. Box. Contact ISSS if you have further issues with your mailing address.

10. Should I keep a copy of my application?
Yes, always keep copies of all official documents that you send through the mail. We also strongly recommend that you make copies of any checks or money orders that you mail to USCIS as proof of payment in case your application is lost in the mail.

11. How can I check on the status of my application?
When USCIS sends you your I-797 receipt notice, you will receive a receipt number which begins with three letters; for example, “LIN” or “YSC”. Use this number to track your application at the following USCIS website: https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do

12. What happens to my dependents, who are on F-2 visas, during the application and STEM OPT process?
If you are granted STEM OPT work authorization, you are still in legal F-1 visa status. Your dependents also remain in legal F-2 visa status. You will receive new I-20s for yourself and all dependents if you are eligible for the OPT STEM work authorization.

STEM OPT AND TRAVELING

13. Can I travel home (or anywhere outside of the U.S.) while I am on STEM OPT?
Pending STEM OPT: It is NOT RECOMMENDED to travel outside of the United States while you are pending STEM OPT approval if your post-completion OPT has already expired. Until your STEM OPT is approved, you have no legal documentation for re-entry into the United States and you could be denied entry by Customs and Border Protection agents. If you must travel while STEM OPT is pending and your OPT has already expired, please discuss your situation with an ISSS advisor.

If you have applied for STEM OPT but your post-completion OPT is still valid, you may travel abroad. It is recommended students travel with:
- I-797 receipt
- Passport valid for at least 6 months after re-entry date
- STEM OPT I-20 signed for travel
- Post-completion OPT EAD card
- Valid F-1 visa
- Letter from your employer, explaining your employment and that you are expected back to continue work

Approved STEM OPT:
If you have been approved for STEM OPT and have received a new EAD card, you may travel abroad. It is recommended students travel with:
- Passport valid for at least
  - 6 months after re-entry date
- STEM OPT travel
  - EAD card I-20 signed for
  - Valid F-1 visa
  - Letter from your employer, explaining your employment and that you are expected back to continue work

**Please Note:** When you receive your EAD card it will say, “not valid for travel”. This means in addition to your EAD card, you will need an I-20, valid passport, and F-1 visa in order to travel. However, you must carry your EAD card with you when traveling.

**Please understand that entry into the U.S. is granted at the discretion of the CBP officer, and you travel at your own risk. Please note that if your visa is expired, in order to re-enter the US, you will need to renew it at a US embassy. This will increase your travel risk since the renewal is at the discretion of the embassy.**

**Dependent travel:** An F2 dependent must carry copies of the F-1 student’s I-20 with STEM OPT approval, EAD card, and proof of employment, in addition to their own F-2 I-20 when traveling.

14. I want to leave the U.S. for a short time while my STEM OPT application is in process, but I need to return before the card will arrive. I have a tourist visa (B2) that is valid for 10 years. Can’t I just enter the U.S. on my tourist visa while I’m waiting to get the EAD card, and then start work with the card once I get it? **NO!!** If you intend to continue working on your OPT or STEM OPT, **NEVER** enter in any other immigration status except your current F-1 status. If you leave the U.S. and re-enter with a B status, you will have lost your F-1 status and your OPT and/or STEM OPT will be invalid!

15. **Can I renew my F-1 visa while on the STEM OPT?**
   The risk of denial of an application for a renewed visa stamp for STEM OPT is somewhat higher than while you are in your active student program. The F-1 student visa requires that the applicant must intend to return to the home country at the end of the program, and if the embassy official is not convinced of your intention to return home, the visa application will be denied. However, it is possible and many students on STEM OPT get their F-1 visa stamps renewed. You do have to be careful to demonstrate non-immigrant intent. Please see ISSS advisor to discuss more in detail.

16. **What documents do I need to show at the embassy for a new visa stamp under STEM OPT?**
   You need to take a valid passport, the STEM OPT EAD card, your most recent I-20, **AND your job offer letter or proof of employment.** The official job offer letter must be clear that your position is temporary, not permanent. You should also be prepared to discuss how this job experience will apply to the job market in your home country, and how you intend to apply it there. For additional information, visit your embassy website or contact the embassy directly.

17. **Do I still need my I-20 endorsed for travel if I am on STEM OPT?**
Yes, during the STEM OPT period, if you travel outside the U.S., you need to have the travel line signed every six months in order to re-enter the U.S. If you are not located in the Salt Lake area, you may request an “I-20 Reprint” through iStart and arrange for a new I-20 to be mailed to you.

OPT AND EMPLOYMENT

18. Do I need to have job offer to apply for the STEM OPT?
Yes, you are required to have a job offer to apply for STEM OPT. To be eligible for a STEM OPT extension, your employer must be registered in the E-verify program. Please check with your employer to find out if they participate in E-Verify. You are required to provide their E-Verify number on your STEM OPT application, as well as a completed form I-983.

19. Do I need to have a job while I am on the STEM OPT?
Yes, you do need to be employed while on your STEM OPT. You are only allowed to have a total of 150 calendar days of unemployment aggregate while on OPT and STEM OPT (90 days on OPT, 60 additional days during STEM). This total number of unemployment applies through the entire period of OPT with the maximum limit of 90 during post-completion OPT. Please remember that you MUST update your employment information and your training plan with ISSS while on STEM OPT.

20. Can I change my employer while on STEM OPT?
A student may change employers during the 24-month period, but all employers that a student will work for during the STEM extension period must be registered in the E-Verify program, and the student must report the change, including submitting a new Form I-983 to ISSS within 10 days of the change.

21. Can I be self-employed on STEM OPT?
Students may be employed by start-up businesses, however, all regulatory requirements must be met and the student may not provide employer attestations on his or her own behalf.

22. How do I calculate the 10 year eligibility period for STEM for a previous degree?
The 10 year eligibility period for previously-earned STEM degrees is determined by the date the degree was conferred/earned (reflected on the official transcript). The application date is the date on which the DSO recommends the STEM OPT extension on the I-20.

23. What kind of compensation should I be receiving from my STEM OPT employer?
STEM OPT employers must provide compensation to the student commensurate to that provided to similarly situated U.S. workers. Alternative compensation may be allowed during STEM OPT as long as the student can show that he or she is a bona fide employee and that his or her compensation, including any ownership interest in the employer entity (such as stock options), is commensurate with the compensation provided to other similarly situated US workers.

24. What happens if I do not comply with parts of/any of the STEM requirements?
Failure to comply will result in a loss of F-1 status. Students who lose their F-1 status must depart from the country immediately as their F-1 visa status is no longer valid. Students with another status in process that allows them to remain in the US should seek advice from an immigration attorney.

25. Can I have multiple employers on STEM OPT?
Yes; however, each employer must fully comply with the regulations (complete and sign a Form I-983 for each employer) and employ the student full-time. Full time consists of 21 hours or more per week.